

Prepaid calling cards are not problem-free. If you are considering purchasing a prepaid calling card, you need to read and understand all the fine print and find out who to contact if there is a problem with the card. Some consumers have purchased cards and later discovered that companies have gone out of business or that some toll-free access numbers are always busy, preventing use of the card. Be sure to shop around and buy a reputable product.

Will Lifeline or Link-Up Help with Long Distance Costs?

No. However, some long distance companies offer similar types of assistance to consumers enrolled in the Lifeline and Link-Up programs. The OUCC encourages you to ask your long distance provider about this, and to consider it when shopping for long distance service.

The Telecommunications Research Action Center (TRAC) is one source of information for comparing rates for presubscribed or direct-dialed long distance service, dial-around services and prepaid calling cards. TRAC is an independent, nonprofit consumer group. You can find information on TRAC's web site at www.trac.org. If you do not have access to a computer, you can request a rate comparison chart by sending \$5 and a self-addressed stamped envelope to TRAC, P.O. Box 27279, Washington, D.C., 20005.

Other online sources for long distance comparisons include ABTolls.com, at <http://abtolls.com>.

The Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor (OUCC)

The Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor (OUCC) is the state agency that represents the interests of all utility consumers and the public in matters related to the provision of electric, natural gas, telephone, water and sewer utility services in Indiana.

The OUCC is active in proceedings before regulatory agencies and courts, committed to giving consumers a voice in the creation of utility services policy, and available to respond to consumer questions and information needs with regard to utility services.

Contact Us

If you have a question or concern regarding your electric, natural gas, telephone, water or sewer utility service, please let us know. We will make every effort to assist you with a concern, and your feedback will help us better serve other Indiana utility consumers. We welcome your input.

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CONSUMER NEWS



Staying Connected

with
**Lifeline &
Link-Up**

Indiana
Office of
Utility
Consumer
Counselor



What are Lifeline & Link-Up?

Lifeline and Link-Up are federal subsidy programs designed to ensure that consumers with low incomes can afford local telephone service. The programs are administered by local telephone companies.

Lifeline Benefits

Lifeline lowers the cost of local home telephone service by at least \$5.25 per month, with certain local telephone companies offering larger credits. If you choose to block direct access to long distance service (toll-blocking), Lifeline removes the need to pay a deposit to receive new local phone service. (More information on toll-blocking is included in this brochure.) Lifeline is only available for one phone line per eligible home.

Link-Up Benefits

Link-Up covers 50 percent of the connection charge for new telephone service, usually up to a maximum amount. (Contact your local phone company for specific information.) Link-Up also allows you to finance connection charges over a period of one year without interest. Link-Up is available for only one telephone line per eligible home, but may be used for subsequent connection charges if you move to a new residence.

Some telephone companies offer more than one option for Lifeline/Link-Up benefits. Also, some companies may use customized names (such as Universal Service Assistance Lifeline) for these programs.

Eligibility

Consumers enrolled in one or more of the following assistance programs may be eligible to receive Lifeline and Link-Up benefits:

- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
- Food Stamps
- Federal Public Housing Assistance
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients served by some telephone companies are able to participate.

All of the following conditions are required for Lifeline and Link-Up eligibility:

- Telephone service must be listed in your name
- You cannot be listed as a dependent on another person's tax return
- Telephone service must be for your primary residence (not a business or second home)

How to Apply

Contact your local phone company's customer service department to apply for Lifeline/Link-Up Benefits. Contact information can be found on your telephone bill or in the phone book.

Your local phone company will provide a simple, one-page application to complete. You must return the completed application to your phone company with documentation of your participation in one of the public assistance programs listed above.

What is Included in Lifeline Telephone Service?

All qualifying low-income consumers receive basic, single-party telephone service with access to the normal supplemental services, such as emergency services, long distance and directory assistance. Toll-blocking is also available to Lifeline consumers free of charge.

Toll-Blocking

Toll-blocking prevents the placement of direct-dialed long distance calls and the use of other direct-dialed toll services.

If you experience frequent service disconnections due to unpaid telephone bills, toll-blocking could help you maintain uninterrupted local service by preventing the accumulation of long distance and other toll charges, such as operator assisted calls, collect calls and directory assistance.

Toll-blocking offers several benefits for Lifeline customers. If you use toll-blocking, you do not have to pay a deposit to receive new local phone service.

You also can protect your household from unauthorized long distance charges or unauthorized calls to other services that bill you by the minute, such as "900" numbers.

If you request toll-blocking, you may still be able to make important long distance calls from your home by using a prepaid calling card. (Check with your local telephone company to make sure you can reach toll-free calling card access numbers from a toll-blocked line.)